

Kiwanis festival is a lot of fun with lots of talent

Written by Richard Amery

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The Kiwanis Music and Speech Arts Festival has been a showcase for up and coming talented performers for the past 80 years. It's been a way for musicians and performers to get their performing feet wet and pick up a few tips on their performance from experienced adjudicators, not to mention win a few prizes.



The first big show to end the first week of the two week festival is tonight's (March 20) Third Annual Musical Theatre Showcase, which gets underway at 7:30 p.m. at the Yates Centre. It features some of the best musical theatre performances from the past week.

"We had over 100 entrants in musical theatre. They had costumes and props and make-up. It was amazing," enthused Carole Roberts who is enjoying her fifth year as the festival's executive director, she said, pointing out Stephen Nguyen and Matthew Blackburn's performances in Piano Concerto — Classical-12 and Under and Provincial National Pianoforte solo respectively as highlights so far.

"They did concerts that left us speechless," Roberts said adding this year's festival has over 1,400 entrants and 5,000 participants including members of bands, orchestras and choirs.

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“We’re seeing more this year,” she observed adding this week has included not only musical theatre but vocals, piano, solo instrumentalists, choruses, choirs and bands.

“It’s growing each year,” she said adding the entrants are choosing unique numbers to perform, utilizing the Internet and YouTube for extra hints and ideas about their performances.

“It’s been great. The adjudicators have noticed they’ve really been refining their performances.” Concerts have been happening throughout the week at the Yates and Sterndale Bennett Theatres, as well as at the Lethbridge Public Library Theatre Gallery, Note-able Music, Southminster United Church, St. Augustine’s Hall.

“The senior strings was a highlight too. It is quite awe inspiring to hear a single violin note shimmer across the room. And the choirs have been fantastic,” she said.

“These young people are completely dedicated to the love of music. They are well behaved and dressed nice and their repertoire is getting so advanced. It’s been just amazing,” she said while there haven’t been any scheduling conflicts, some of them have had to run between the Yates and Sterndale Bennett Theatres to get to two different performances scheduled almost simultaneously.

Junior Voice adjudicator Erinn Roberts was impressed with the talent on display this year, and having participated in the festival from age 8 until 21 when she graduated university, she knows how the performers are feeling. The vocalist went on to earn her doctorate in music.

“I really felt a lot of them prepared and delivered polished and professional performances,” she said adding she has also adjudicated at festivals in B.C. as well as Stettler and Medicine Hat. “This has been a lot of fun there have been great song choices and beautiful singing,” she said.

“(As an adjudicator) I’m looking for someone with the whole package — a song delivered artistically, a beautiful voice and healthy technique as well as a well polished and emotional performance,” she continued adding a highlight was Olivia Earl, who was competing in the Traditional Air/Sea Shanty/ Spiritual category as well as Lyric Poetry Solo 11 and Under, Solo Scene Contemporary -12 and Under, Solo Prose 12 and Under and Movie/TV/Pop Solo Ballad 10 and under.

“She just had everything I was looking for. It was beautiful. It was really lovely. I gave her a 91, the highest mark I’ve ever given,” she said.

“Adjudicating is a lot of fun. I really enjoy it.”

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Some of the best performers from this year's festival will be back on stage March 27 at the Stars of the Festival Concert at the Yates Centre. It begins at 7:30 p.m.

— *By Richard Amery, L.A. Beat Editor*{jcomments on}